



A Spurious Slavonic Inscription from the Danube Canal

Author(s): G. Nandriş

Source: *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 38, No. 91 (Jun., 1960), pp. 530-534

Published by: the [Modern Humanities Research Association](#) and [University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4205183>

Accessed: 14/06/2014 05:19

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Slavonic and East European Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Marginalia

A Spurious Slavonic Inscription from the Danube Canal

G. NANDRIȘ

IN 1958 the association of Slavists of the Rumanian people's republic presented to the fourth international congress of Slavists in Moscow three volumes of Slavo-Rumanian contributions.¹ The first volume contains an epigraphic study in Russian of a Slavonic inscription, by Damian P. Bogdan, a Rumanian scholar well known for his editions of Slavo-Rumanian documents. The title of the study is *Dobružanskaja nadpis' 943 goda*. This inscription was discovered in 1950 during the digging of the Danube-Black sea canal. Bogdan's contribution is one of many studies dedicated since 1950 to 'the oldest Slavonic inscription' of the year 943.

The history of this inscription is not without interest. Its discovery was announced in 1950 in the second number of volume I of *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche*, published by the Rumanian academy, by a photograph of the inscription inserted after a political manifesto on 'The historical importance of comrade Stalin's works for the study of society in the primitive stage and in slavery' (this manifesto is a translation from the *Vestnik drevney istorii*, no. 4, 1949, pp. 3-14). The caption beneath the photograph reads: 'Slavonic inscription discovered in Dobrogea in 1950, during the construction of the Danube-Black Sea Canal. The stone is today in the National Museum of Antiquities in Bucarest. According to some opinions this could be the oldest known Slavonic inscription (year 943 our era).'² Note that no opinion is expressed and no other explanation given concerning the origin of this important archaeological object photographed in the museum of Bucarest and inserted in the publication as if to illustrate the preceding article. In the same year the photograph also appeared in a catalogue of the archaeological exhibition in Bucarest.

Volume II of *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche* provides new information in a report on archaeological researches in the Danube-Black sea canal.³ It says that the inscription was found in the *castrum* no. VIII, near the railway station of Mircea Vodă, on a slab of limestone lying among some hundred other slabs. This *castrum* had been searched many years before by the historian and archaeologist Gr. Tocilescu. It also says that the Slavonic inscription chiselled in stone was taken to Bucarest to be studied. The same photocopy is reproduced. It was taken not *in situ* but in the museum. The Cyrillic inscription is not transcribed or reproduced, and only a Rumanian translation of the text is given: '. . . on Greeks in the year 6451 (namely 943 our era) . . . on Demetrius'. In the second number of the same volume of *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche* another photograph is

¹ *Romanoslavica*, vols. I-III, Bucarest, 1958.

² *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche*, vol. I, no. 2, July-December, 1950, following page 18 (Academia Republicii Populare Române).

³ Eugen Comșa și Dorin Popescu, 'Cercetări arheologice pe traseul Canalului Dunăre-Marea Neagră' (*Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche*, vol. II, no. 1, January-June, 1951, pp. 169-76).

reproduced on which, however, no inscription is visible. The caption of this second photograph reads: 'The limestone slab on which the Slavonic inscription is chiselled seen from above.'

The authors of the first studies of this inscription do not transcribe the text and do not analyse its Slavonic content. This is dealt with by the Czech scholar, F. V. Mareš, in an article on the Gnezdovo inscription,⁴ the last three pages of which are dedicated to the Danube canal inscription. We are told that it has been studied from a photographic reproduction in the catalogue of the archaeological exhibition of the 1950 excavations. Its text is reproduced and analysed: ГЪР(Ъ)ЦѢХЪ|| (Ъ) ЛѢТО : ѠУНА|| (Р) ИДИМИТРЪ (БЪ)=Girčexī (loc. pl.) vŭ lěto 6451 (943) Dimitrě(?) . . . dimi trěbŭ(?)

The deciphered words of the three-line text are the year 6451 and 'in Greece'. In his analysis, Mareš notes that from a philological point of view the text presents two anachronisms: the group -*irī*- is not possible in Bulgarian spelling, and the soft *jer* in the locative plural is not admitted in the period in question. But from a palaeographic point of view (the form of the letters) the Danube canal inscription is similar to tsar Samuel's inscription and to the inscription of Preslav, and it also has common features with the Gnezdovo inscription. Mareš disregards the phonetic and morphological anomalies of the text and does not question the authenticity of the inscription. We note that spellings with -*irī*- for -*ri*- occur in Russian, but more than a century later, while soft *jer*, after a spirant velar, would be possible in Old Serbian orthography.

For the beginning of the 10th century, an accumulation of Old Russian, Old Serbian, and Old Bulgarian features in one single word is rather difficult to account for. The expected form in Old Slavonic would be *Gričexŭ*.

Among other scholars who support the authenticity of the inscription is the Bulgarian professor, E. Georgiev. It is interesting to note that Georgiev takes as the basis of his exposition a form **Girčexŭ*. He states that the succession -*ir*- occurs in the Preslav inscription in the word *cirky* and so causes no surprise in the Danube canal inscription. His conclusion is that the Danube canal inscription proves an early diffusion of Cyrillic in Dobrogea. But the Cyrillic form assumed by Georgiev does not occur in the Danube canal inscription.⁵ Mareš read *Girčixŭ*, and the photograph shows a letter B, after the letter P, similar to the letter which precedes P. Further, the succession -*ir*- in *cirky* is phonetically justified, whereas in **Girkŭ* it is not. The Primary chronicle records the form *Grikŭ*; the Macedonian *Folia* have the adjective *gričsky*; and the Russian form is *Grek*. Georgiev reconstructed his wrong form from the same photocopy which he reproduced on page 91. Russian scholars reviewing Georgiev's study accept his verdict and draw far-reaching historical conclusions.⁶

⁴ F. V. Mareš, 'Dva objevy starých slovanských nápisů (v SSSR u Smolensku a v Rumunsku)' (*Slavia*, XX, 1951, pp. 497-514).

⁵ E. Georgiev, *Slavjanskaja pis'menosť do Kirilla i Meŭodija*, Sofia, 1952, p. 61.

⁶ N. A. Kondrašov in *Voprosy jazykoznanija*, no. 6, 1952, pp. 144-50. M. P. Sotnikov in *Voprosy istorii*, no. 3, 1953, pp. 98-103. S. B. Bernštein, 'Osnovnyje zadači, metody i principy sravnitel'noj grammatiki slavjanskich jazykov' (*Voprosy jazykoznanija*, no. 2, 1954, p. 56).

Mareš's palaeographic analysis of the Danube canal inscription is based on a study of the Gnezdovo inscription: a method which raises even more doubts about the inscription's genuineness. The only word appearing on the Gnezdovo pottery fragment has not been satisfactorily explained. There is no agreement between Mareš and Černych⁷ whether the word is an adjective or a noun and from which root it is derived. There is no agreement between other scholars whether the word is the name of the potter or of the pot, of the contents of the pot or of a hero. It has been suggested that it may be a cryptogram. It is not certain whether it is Greek or Slavonic. The word was engraved on the pot after it had been burnt. One letter is disturbingly reminiscent of a cursive Cyrillic; two other letters are unusual.⁸ Mareš reads in this word a phrase: *Goruch psa* 'Goruch wrote'; and he quotes a parallel signature from the *Savvina Kniga*: *pop Savva psalū*. But he is aware that in the latter case priest Savva wrote a text, whereas in the first case the situation is different. All these difficulties are disregarded, and on this palaeographic analysis he bases his analysis of the Danube canal inscription. He finds that some letters of this inscription could be compared with the corresponding letters in the Gnezdovo inscriptions, others with letters in tsar Samuel's or in the Preslav inscription, and all of them are similar to Greek majuscules on parchments of the 7th–10th centuries. In conclusion, the Danube canal inscription, tsar Samuel's inscription, and the Preslav and Gnezdovo inscriptions, not forgetting the doubtful Tmutarakan' inscription, form a group and prove a Russian influence, from Smolensk to Greece, in the 10th century. This conclusion is arrived at even though a philological analysis, according to Mareš (p. 513), would indicate a later date for both inscriptions.

The same method is used by D. P. Bogdan when assessing the age and lineage of the Danube canal inscription in his comprehensive study, 'The inscription of the year 943, a palaeographic and philological study', referred to above, which also includes an earlier palaeographic analysis made by the author. We expressed doubts about the authenticity of this inscription in a note written in 1953 and published in 1954.⁹ The opening sentence in Bogdan's study gives 1951 as the year of the discovery, which is apparently a misprint for 1950. The number of words in the inscription has increased to nine, and their transcription in Cyrillic and translation in Russian are given: . . . 8И ГЪ.РЬЦЪХЪ|| (В)Ъ ЛѢТО/СЪУНА|| (П)РИ ДѢМИТРѢ БЪ|| . . . ЖОУПАНѢ . . . =против Греков в 6451 году при Димитрии жупане . . . i.e. 'against the Greeks (Greece) in the year 6451 in the time of župan Dimitri'. It is impossible to see which preposition with the locative is assumed to render 'against Greece' even if one accepts the correctness of this reading, which is not supported by the photocopy. Bogdan reconstructs it by conjecture, assuming that the text refers to an invasion of the Byzantine empire by the Magyars in

⁷ P. Ja. Černych in *Izvestija A. N., SSSR, Otd. lit. i jaz.*, IX, 1950, pp. 398–400.

⁸ D. A. Avdusin and M. N. Tichomorov, 'Drevnejšaja russkaja nadpis' (*Vestnik A. N. SSSR*, XX, 1950, pp. 71–9).

⁹ G. Nandriș, 'Falsificarea Istoriei' (*Buletinul Bibliotecii Române*, vol. II, Freiburg i. Br., October, 1954, pp. 84–6).

April 943. According to a chronicle, a Bulgarian zhupan Dimitri also took part in the battle of that year. This fitting of an event related by a chronicle into the few words of a conjectural inscription is not very convincing.

The greater part of Bogdan's study is taken up by a detailed epigraphic analysis of the 22 letters which the author has read in the text. Their sizes, forms, lines, and positions are minutely described. The letters are compared with the letters of seven other inscriptions from places far apart, and similarities are found for every line of each letter. The fact that various lines of certain letters have to be verified in different inscriptions does not carry much weight. What palaeographic conclusion can be drawn from the fact that two circles hewn in limestone, scratched on a pot, or engraved in marble, in order to render the letter o are similar or slightly different from each other? This minute description shows only the inconsistency of the palaeographic features of the inscription.

When Bogdan tries to support his argument with philological facts, he overlooks even the reservations made by Mareš. So the methodological deficiency is even more apparent. E.g. he reads a word БЪ after *Děimitrě* and says that it stands for БЫ. He justifies this conjecture by quoting the alternative forms in Old Church Slavonic НАРЕЧЕНЪИ and НАРЕЧЕНЪИИ. However the position of the *jer* in the *bŭ/by* (from *byti*?) is quite different. In the case of *narečenŭj* > *narečenyj* the *j* accounts for *jery*; the form *bŭ* could not phonetically become *by*; it could be explained palaeographically only by obliteration of the second part of the letter. Other philological arguments introduced into the discussion are equally irrelevant, and the conclusion lacks any foundation.

From the philological examination of the *jers* in this inscription it is impossible to accept Bogdan's swift conclusion that already at the beginning of the 10th century the two *jers* were only graphic symbols without any phonetic value and that therefore they were interchanged. Isolated cases of vocalisation, interchange, or disappearance of *jers* occur already in Old Church Slavonic texts (end of the 10th–11th century); but the reduced vowels had a longer life in East Slavonic than in the South, and the soft *jer* has left its effect on the preceding consonant in Russian until today. The use of soft *jer* for both *jers* is a feature of Old Serbian spelling which was introduced later in Russia also. The spelling *-ir-* for *-iř-*, representing Old Church Slavonic *-iř-*, occurs in Old Russian over a century later in isolated cases, due first to writing techniques: the group *-iř-* was written at the end of a line to avoid a closed syllable.¹⁰

Whereas the philological arguments plead, in Bogdan's view, for a Russian version of the text, palaeographically the inscription is South Slavonic. Not even by a stretch of the imagination can we reconcile the contradictions between palaeography and philology, between the reading and the interpretation of one author and another, so as to accept their conclusions as valid. Not only does one author contradict the others in the reading and interpretation of the Danube canal inscription, but one and the same author draws *a priori* conclusions from facts which appear

¹⁰ V. Vondrák, *Vergleichende Grammatik der slavischen Sprachen*, I, 1924, p. 183.

contradictory even in his own analysis. The hypothetical assumption of one author is accepted as a certainty by another, and peremptory conclusions drawn from such assumptions receive general approval.

Misreadings, misinterpretations, and forgeries have existed and will exist. It is disturbing however that so many distinguished scholars should not have felt the need to see a better photograph, or should not have considered it necessary to examine personally the original of such an important historical document available in the museum of antiquities in Bucarest. Meanwhile, thanks to their blessing, the inscription from the Danube canal has taken first place among Slavonic inscriptions, has crossed the ocean and has triumphantly entered a prayer book,¹¹ though it had at first been received with suspicion in the new world.¹²

Dr Benjamin Woodroffe and the Hungarian Malcontents

E. D. TAPPE

DR BENJAMIN WOODROFFE, who became principal of Gloucester Hall, Oxford, in 1692, is chiefly known for his scheme of forming there a college of Greek students.¹ This was only one of many far-flung and exotic interests; for instance, he collaborated in a Portuguese translation of the Book of Common Prayer. Even so, it is surprising to find that in 1704 he proposed himself as mediator between the Habsburg Emperor Leopold and the Hungarian rebels under Francis Rákóczy.

As Hungary and Transylvania passed from the Turkish sway to that of Austria, the Emperor Leopold took measures to suppress protestantism in his newly acquired dominions. It was thus chiefly among Hungarian protestants that Francis Rákóczy, himself a catholic, found support for his attempt to win Hungarian independence. He negotiated the help of Louis XIV, and then in June 1703 openly took up arms against Leopold.

The British government of the day wanted the emperor to be able to concentrate his attention on resisting France. At the same time British public opinion tended to be in favour of helping protestants oppressed by a Roman catholic government. The natural course was therefore for the British government to intervene, and try to obtain concessions from the emperor for the Hungarian 'malcontents'. Accordingly in April 1704 the British ambassador, Stepney, in conjunction with the Dutch ambassador, Bruynincks, was commissioned to offer mediation. This proposal was accepted by both sides, but the matter dragged on. Meanwhile, hearing of this intervention, Woodroffe wrote to Robert Harley, secretary

¹¹ P. Kovaliv, *Prayer Book, a Monument of the 14th Century*, New York, 1960, p. 19 (Scientific Theological Institute of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of U.S.A.).

¹² R. Jakobson, 'Vestiges of the Earliest Russian Vernacular' (*Slavic Word*, vol. 8, no. 4, December, 1952, p. 350).

¹ E. D. Tappe, 'The Greek College at Oxford, 1699-1705' (*Oxoniensia*, XIX, Oxford, 1954, pp. 92-111).